

Interview – *cd.cadao* for *May The Magazine*

— creative role

- **How did your journey into tattooing unfold, and what drew you to explore the cultural visual languages behind your designs?**

For as long as I can remember, I dreamed of becoming a free-spirited artist. Drawing was the one constant in my childhood, the thing that made the world feel gentle and familiar. Everything changed the day I noticed a tattoo on a stranger's arm. Back then, tattooing wasn't common in Vietnam, yet something about that mark stirred me. It felt like a quiet calling, as if this craft might someday become my entire life.

I carried that quiet dream for years until I met a tattoo artist who lived with a devotion that moved me deeply. He is now my husband. With his support, I began teaching myself, starting from the simplest strokes and slowly shaping a path that felt true to me.

Choosing to work with ethnic motifs came from years of wandering and searching. I entered this craft at 30, with a head and heart full of memories from traveling across Vietnam. I had seen so many forms of beauty: women in the highlands stitching by the roadside, children dressed in vibrant colors, old weaving looms resting inside humble wooden homes. These images are among the most peaceful memories I carry.

At first, I simply wanted to preserve my own stories through these motifs. But as I learned more, a deeper intention formed, I hoped more people could appreciate the cultural richness behind them, and that my work could in some small way support ethnic minority communities in Vietnam.

- **Your work carries such a powerful sense of identity. How is your own identity expressed in your designs?**

My identity rests in how I feel and observe the world. Every line I draw holds a certain sincerity, an emotional rhythm that connects me to the person on the other side of the needle. That exchange, that quiet understanding between artist and wearer, is something I cherish dearly.

- **The patterns you explore are rooted in rich, layered traditions within Vietnam's ethnic communities. How has exploring these motifs shaped your understanding of your own cultural identity?**

Exploring traditional motifs has expanded my perspective. It has filled me with pride, admiration, and a deep empathy for the stories carried within each pattern. It reminded me that culture isn't distant, it lives in everyday gestures, in old objects, in woven fabrics, in the way people speak and move.

This journey has also led me beyond the attire of ethnic minorities, into the wider world of Vietnamese motifs across architecture, painting, and historic craftsmanship. There is so much to learn, and so much worth carrying forward.

- **How would you describe the “heart” of your work?**

At the heart of my practice is respect, respect for cultural heritage, and for the emotions of each person who trusts me with their skin. I want every tattoo, no matter how small, to have a purpose and a quiet truth to it.

- **How does the environment of th.ink.room influence your process and the stories you want to tell?**

My studio is a place of calm, somewhere I can unwind, listen, and connect. It isn't loud or hurried, it holds a kind of stillness that nurtures creativity. That gentle atmosphere gives me space to breathe, and from there, inspiration comes more naturally.

— cultural reimagination

- **In your eyes, what do these traditional patterns in Vietnamese visual art mean for its culture?**

Traditional patterns carry layers of meaning: historical, spiritual, emotional. Some mark turning points in our national story, some embody collective hopes, and others live quietly in our shared memory, reminding us of who we are and where we've been.

- **What are the frequent symbols that you use in your designs, and how do they convey a different meaning from their original context?**

I feel these motifs speak beautifully to our present time. They meet young people where they are, yet their essence remains intact. This allows anyone who wears them to carry a cultural narrative while still feeling deeply connected to themselves.

- **Do you feel a sense of cultural responsibility when working with ethnic heritage, and if so, how does that responsibility guide your artistic choices?**

I carry a strong sense of responsibility. That is why I take the time to understand the origins of each motif before using it. My hope is always to represent them with the spirit they deserve.

- **Your tattoos give ethnic minority art a new medium. How do you stay rooted in cultural meaning while still allowing your own style to develop?**

Culture is my foundation, style is my expression. I allow myself to explore different ways of interpreting these patterns to connect with younger generations and anyone who finds meaning in them. As long as the original essence is honored, creativity feels like a natural extension.

- **To what extent do you feel traditional art can be redesigned or reinterpreted without losing its cultural integrity?**

To me, tradition thrives when it is renewed with care. As long as the spirit remains, reinterpretation is not only acceptable, it is necessary. Culture survives by living alongside us, moving with the present rather than remaining frozen in time.

— the body as a canvas

- **You inspire many people far beyond HCM, even those who don't share the same cultural roots or references. Why do you think this translation into tattoo art resonates so deeply today?**

I think no matter what culture they come from, people have a need to seek meaning, to return to their roots, and to tell their own stories. Vietnam's ethnic motifs carry universal messages, protection, hope, connection, which resonate deeply with many. When I share the stories behind them, people often find a piece of their own journey reflected there. I think that's what draws them in, the meeting point between tradition and human experience.

- **Tattoos often hold personal stories, dreams, or identities. How do you see this intimate meaning intertwining with the cultural narratives carried in your designs?**

I see a tattoo as a meeting place for two stories. In that encounter, culture comes alive, not confined to pages or museums, but living,

breathing, and unfolding on the human body. Culture also begins with people. It grows from daily life.

- **How do people respond to your work, especially those who share the cultural background of the patterns you reinterpret?**

Many people tell me my work feels deeply Vietnamese, that it reminds them of family, of childhood memories, of things they thought they had forgotten. They come to me with their stories, and to me, that is the clearest sign that I am moving in the right direction.

- **When you tattoo heritage-inspired pieces, do you feel that a form of cultural exchange takes place?**

Absolutely. That exchange is something I always welcome. I'm happy to share what I know about Vietnamese culture and our way of life. Language can be a barrier, but I'm learning. And if someday Vietnamese becomes widely spoken across the world, I would be incredibly proud.

- **What has been the most surprising or memorable reaction you've received to your tattoo art?**

One of my most memorable experiences was with a friend from another country. After receiving a tattoo from me, they returned to Vietnam many times and told me they felt even more connected to this place. We became close friends. It touched me deeply because this is exactly what

I hoped for when I began this journey, to let people feel the warmth of Vietnam through the stories carried on their skin.

— print to poke

- **Your work moves between linocut printing and tattooing. How did this parallel practice first take shape for you?**

Honestly, this project began as a quiet experiment, a parallel path unfolding beside my tattoo practice. Rather than letting my creativity live in a single medium, I wanted it to breathe in a wider space. As I mentioned, reaching different audiences and opening new ways of connection feels important to me. Learning a new skill at this stage isn't just growth, it feels like giving myself another vessel to carry the stories I love.

- **What makes linocut such a meaningful part of your process?**

Linocut offers a slowness that tattooing rarely allows. When traditional motifs are carved onto a block, they reveal a different kind of beauty, a gentle shift into something slightly more contemporary, yet still rooted in the cultural memory they come from. It's like seeing a familiar story under a new light.

- **Do you see a connection between carving a block and tattooing the skin?**

For me, the charm of linocut lies in its rhythm, the deliberate pace, the meticulous carving, the steady movement of hand and breath. It's a practice that asks for presence.

— collective path forward

- **In your view, why does it matter to give ethnic Vietnamese art forms a new stage in contemporary culture?**

I believe this work matters because culture only truly lives when its stories continue to evolve. The art of Vietnam's ethnic communities is incredibly rich, technically refined, and deeply symbolic, yet so many details are slowly slipping out of sight. Giving them space in today's visual landscape feels like a small way of keeping those stories breathing.

- **Do you see your work as part of a broader movement in Vietnamese art or tattoo culture?**

I've always felt that I'm just one small part of a much broader movement. Many Vietnamese artists are returning to their roots, reconnecting with heritage and identity, and it's beautiful to witness that energy growing. If my work can contribute even a single thread to that shared tapestry, a voice, a gesture, a perspective, that alone is meaningful to me.

- **How do you feel your work fits into the broader Vietnamese art scene or conversations around identity and cultural revival?**

My work is a personal way of answering the question, “Who am I?” in the midst of modern life. I think many young people are searching for the same sense of belonging, and traditional motifs offer a place to anchor themselves, something familiar yet expansive. Through tattooing, I’m simply adding my own small fragment to a larger conversation about identity, memory, and returning home.

- **What do you wish people carry with them when wearing your art on their skin?**

I hope that when people carry my art on their skin, they also carry a sense of connection, to themselves, to culture, to community, and to the stories that weave across generations. If a tattoo can become a quiet reminder of where they come from, or a companion to the values they wish to hold close, then I feel I am honoring the intention behind this work.